A Thesis on Anasarca

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Philadelphia March 7th 1822

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Anasarca.

This disease consists in a preternatural collection of a serous or watery fluid in the common cellular tissue of the body, & is usually attributed to a destruction of that just equilibrium between exhalation & absorption, which exists in a healthy condition of the system. This want of harmony & neutralization in these two functions, exhalation & absorption, may arise either from an increase of the former or a diminution of the latter, and it seems in a large majority of cases to originate from an augmented effusion. But it would appear that increased exhalation & diminished absorption have their causes, — which may, very probably be found in an altered & excited action of the bloodvessels — or in a highly debilitated & cachectic state of the system, & these should be regarded as the ultimate & fundamental causes of anasarca or any other species of dropsy.

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Anasarca is induced by whatever impedes the circulation of the blood, as tumours compressing the larger bloodvessels & congestions or obstructions of some of the abdominal viscera, or it is consequent to a great variety of other diseases, which greatly impair the integrity of the constitution; such as intermittent fever, gout, jaundice, dysentery, rheumatism, asthma, pulmonary consumption, pneumonia, scarlatina, erysipelas &c.

It first shews itself by a swelling of the feet and ankles toward evening, which for some time disappears again in the morning. The tumefaction is soft & unelastic & when pressed upon by the finger, retains its impression for a while, the skin becoming much paler than natural. The swelling gradually extends upwards & occupies the legs, thighs & trunk of the body & at last even the face & eyelids appear full & bloated. The disease continuing to

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advance, the cellular tissue of the lungs becomes affected & effusion taking place into the different cavities of the body, we have a universal dropsy. Here the respiration is difficult and oppressed & is accompanied by a cough & an expectoration of a watery fluid. In this stage, the bowels are constipated, the urine is scanty & high coloured, the skin is hot & dry, the perspiration being much obstructed, the pulse is feeble, small, quick & corded & there is more or less thirst, emaciation & a sallow complexion. Torpor, heaviness & a slow, indistinct fever supervene. In some cases the inordinate distention, forces the water through the pores of the skin & in other instances, the cuticle being dense & strong, prevents this transudation & is elevated into blisters, which ultimately terminate in gangrene & mortification. Sometimes from the great distention, the skin is so much hardened, as to give the swelling a considerable degree of firmness.

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The disease is more manageable, when recent than when of long standing. It is also more = easily cured, when originating from topical or general debility, than when it is accompanied or occasioned by visceral derangement.

In the treatment of this disease, two indications are to be fulfilled. First, the evacuation of the accumulated fluid. Secondly, we endeavour to change or remove the morbid condition of the system, producing the disease. I shall first = treat of anasarca connected with a febrile or excited state of the system. The action of the arterial & absorbent systems being in an inverse ratio to each other, whenever we wish to invigorate the operation of the latter, we should subdue the energy of the former, by the various depletory measures. The evacuation most effectual in reducing action, is venesection & this in the present case of dropsy is indispensably necessary, but as in all other cases of disease, we should resort to

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use of this remedy, we have no more injure the by unskilful practitioner.

Serious difficulties, we may result to the patient. Emetics are at one time most useful, from an impression that the [illegible] of [illegible], and the most indomitable [illegible] of that have lost much of their former reputation of [illegible] usefulness. [illegible] to evacuate the stomach [illegible] order. [illegible] believe [illegible] is connected with intermittent fever, [illegible] it occurs in remittent cases. When great torpor of the sensorium of system exist, they often prove usefully by restoring a susceptibility to the influence of other remedies. Retained emesis [illegible] sometimes do good in the disease [illegible] congestion or obstruction of the lungs, with spasm or [illegible]. To do good it is often necessary to repeat them [illegible] depending on the emetic

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are most useful when given as nauseants.

Among the most important remedies in the cure of this disease are purgatives. They have been recommended in cases. They produce three good effects, viz. deviating costiveness, which so universally exists in this disease, & by counter-irritation, thus occasioning a transposition of the morbid action to the intestines, & by reducing the general excitement, as a consequence, invigorate the powers of the system. But there is a choice in purgatives & they should not be promiscuously used.

It was long the fashion to use the drastic hydragogue cathartics; these however are obvious contra-indicated in the present instance, & only proper in old & protracted cases, where the stomach & bowels are torpid, the habit phlegmatic & no fever or visceral obstruction exists. The saline purgatives are decided preferable in this case of particular the tartrates. A combination of jalap & cream of tartar, in the proportions of x grains of the

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dirt, to ℥j. or ℥ij. of the last, constitute the best cathartic in this diseased case. Its effects are often very prompt & satisfactory, it even cures the disease. It should be given once a day or every other day, so as to avoid its constant impression on the system.

These measures proving abortive, we must have recourse to the use of diuretics. One of the best of this apartment of articles in febrile dropsy is undoubtedly the cream of tartar. This will sometimes in a specific dropsical case, & it seems to do this by a combined operation on the intestines & kidneys, producing an increase of serous & aqueous excretions. It should be remembered that the efficacy of this article is materially influenced by the mode of administration, being exclusively diuretic when largely diluted & operating as a powerful hydragogue cathartic, when given with small doses of water or in the form of an electuary, either

alone or in conjunction with some other [illegible]
[illegible]. The other mode is [illegible]
[illegible] to [illegible] the [illegible] mineral waters.

Much has been said [illegible] the antagonistic powers of the vegetable & mineral [illegible] of the two, the first is decidedly to be preferred. This given in the form of the vegetable carbonate & is most appropriate to cases attended with great depravation. The condition of stomach is most common in towns, in country districts & [illegible], in which case [illegible] evacuations, various distressing symptoms. If [illegible] this [illegible] by neutralizing the [illegible] acid & leaving a [illegible] impression on the stomach, subsequent to normal condition, may [illegible] to [illegible] of thus imparting [illegible] to the [illegible] system. Among the medicinal agents, the natural consequence of debilitated [illegible] an in

creases [illegible] of wine or a neutralizer of health. But be its modus operandi what it may, its virtues are greatly enhanced, by a combination with the bitter tonics, as quassia, gentian, columbo, &c. Thus combined, its diuretic powers are [illegible] to be [illegible] it removes the nervous [illegible] of the whole habit. Notwithstanding [illegible] must be acknowledged [illegible] to some of its combinations [illegible] called neutral [illegible]. The acet. jalapa was at one time so high [illegible] as to obtain the [illegible] name of [illegible]; but it has since [illegible] no little of its primitive reputation. The tart. [illegible] later is highly commended by some practitioners, & by some is even preferred to the [illegible]. The common idea [illegible] dangerous, a combination of the cam. [illegible] of [illegible], are sometimes used [illegible] as [illegible].

The nit.

The nit. potass is eminently suited to cases of high or inflammatory fever. This is not very active diuretic, but it powerfully subdues febrile excitement. In order to prevent it from irritating the stomach, it should be taken in water, or with a good deal of water, which may probably be taken in twenty-four hours. Its virtues are improved by being combined with tart. emet. & a small portion of calom. constituting the well known nitrous or antimonial powder.

In gleet this salt is a most diuretic & particularly adapted to the cases of children. It also depresses sexual powers. But we cannot go into details on all these points in this article, nor can we say anything of the three or four times a day. The following is a valuable diuretic, Rx. Pot. acetas ℥ij.

Vin. Ant.	XXX gtts.
Tinct. Cin.	XXX gtts.
Aq. Font.	℥ss. M. ft.

Parsley

Parsley is often a most valuable diuretic. It is even said to have cured dropsy, after many other remedies had failed. It is fashionable to combine water melon seeds with it, but it is very doubtful whether these increase its efficacy. It may be taken copiously in the form of tea or infusion; it is not apt to nauseate the stomach, like many other articles. A decoction of [illegible] species of lichen, is commonly praised, and is to be administered as copiously as the stomach can bear.

The [illegible] which is highly praised by many eminent physicians [illegible] it, probably [illegible] the [illegible] the [illegible]. It often operates [illegible] may be given in the form of [illegible] in substance, in the quantity [illegible] of the latter dissolved in water, in twenty four hours.

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calomel, in the proportions of viii. to x gr. of the [illegible] of the former to j. or ij. gr. of the latter, made into a pill & taken three times a day.

The [illegible] although it retains its place [illegible] among some of the medical men of the continent of Europe, yet it appears to be [illegible] estimated by the British [illegible] It may be given in the form of the [illegible] and in decoction, the quantity of ʒj. being [illegible] three [illegible] [illegible] in the dose of a teaspoonful.

The Alliacea are sometimes useful, of which the garlic is best. It is most beneficial in cases [illegible] where the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Is the [illegible] [illegible] sufficient in the present instance? [illegible] it acts as a

diuretic. Diaphoretics were at one time very fashionable in dropsies & they have often been used with no little success. They are best suited to cases generated by the intermittent fever, & to such as are kept up by the morbid excitation of [illegible], when the pulse is small, frequent, tense [illegible], the skin dry, the body [illegible] & the [illegible] symptoms indicative of a febrile [illegible] inflammatory symptoms exist. Here the blood [illegible] the extremities of the body & [illegible] to the great viscera. In these [illegible] operation, the [illegible] action from the internal parts to the surface of the body, unload the [illegible], restore the [illegible] of the circulation, invigorate the action of the exhalent vessels, & in addition [illegible] increase & thus prevent a further effusion of water, and as the [illegible] inflammation, by diminishing these, the absorbents will probably be enabled to remove the

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[illegible] accumulation. They also tend to remove the proper attendants in this case [illegible] thus create a necessity for other remedial [illegible]. The external means [illegible] phoresis are often very useful. The vapor bath has even been supposed to have cured the disease. Warm air has been thought good in this case. [illegible] with some fever a [illegible] state is seen, [illegible] in typical or partial [illegible]. Also a stimulating pediluvium or general bath. Although the external diaphoretics will often be needed, yet the dose is to be preferred. It is [illegible] when no [illegible] excitement exists. Most [illegible] cases [illegible] the intermittent fever.

[illegible] has been [illegible] recommended by some [illegible] it should be exhibited large [illegible] that it [illegible] the [illegible] the [illegible] effect. [illegible]

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apt to follow [illegible] fomentation. [illegible] gangrene [illegible] so as lightly to compress the limb. [illegible] They have also been used to the [illegible] with much [illegible], especially where there [illegible] debility as they are liable to cause [illegible] cation.

[illegible] condition of the system [illegible] by both general and local [illegible]. When the [illegible] or spots, [illegible] pretty [illegible] apples [illegible]

cold water on the extremities twice or thrice a day, will be found useful. The general remedies, are the various tonics, but particularly the chalybeates. Exercise is very important & must be graduated or adapted to circumstances. It has even cured the disease. The general cold bath will be useful, if the debility be not too great to bear it. If there be a great disposition to a return of the disease, a combination of tonics or bitters & diuretics should be used.

Regimen. The diet should vary according to the state of the system. If there be a febrile or inflammatory excitement, the diet should be low & antiphlogistic & even entire abstinence for several days has been attended with great advantage. But in the opposite condition of the system, the diet should be light & nutritious, as eggs, oysters &c. A rigid attention to diet has sometimes effected cures. Drinks taken pretty copiously, often act as powerful diuretics & thus remove the disease. If the flow of urine be

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increased by their use & other symptoms be amended, they should be continued. But if the urine be not augmented, nor the other symptoms meliorated, they should be immediately discontinued. Simple water or what is better, water impregnated with the vegetable acids, as lemonade, cider & water, vinegar & water &c. may be used. An infusion of juniper berries is useful. An infusion of green pine tops is useful & is sometimes a good diuretic. Watermelons are very good. When there is great atony, weak gin & water or whiskey & water, may be used. These drinks have sometimes alone effected cures & upon the whole, water may be regarded as the most useful & efficient diuretic, as it is necessary to the promotion of the diuretic operation of all other articles.

On